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SUBJECT: FORMER IRGC GENERAL ON US-IRAN RELATIONS

REF: RPO DUBAI 0001

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian L. Burns, Director, Iran Regional
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REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S/NF) Summary: A longtime Iranian-American contact introduced IRPO Director to a former IRGC general, with whom he claimed a long acquaintance. Like many other contacts, he claims many in Iran support rapprochement and believes other countries are working to keep US and Iran apart, to serve their own interests. His comments, however, about a weakened top hierarchy of the IRGC and a disgruntled but influential sector of the IRGC in teaching institutions were interesting. He only spoke tangentially on the nuclear issue, essentially viewing it as a facet of US-Iran bilateral relations. His views of the IRGC and Iranian power circles are reported septel. End summary

US-Iran relations

2.(S/NF) In a December 28 meeting, a former IRGC general called the US a strong friend and a strong enemy. He claimed that the lack of ties between the American and Iranian people is an unnatural state of affairs, but that the longer the status quo drags on in Iran, the more it becomes rooted. He acknowledged the need for a change in Iran -- an apparent allusion to changes in policy direction, not regime change. He believed that a complicating factor on both sides was the increasing number of new offices -- at high levels -- in military and intelligence organizations that focus on confronting the other country. In his view, these new structures are creating negative forces directing both countries towards conflict. To counter this, he suggested creating new offices in the State Department and MFA, as well as in the NGO sector, to focus on ways to reestablish ties.

Blaming others

3.(S/NF) Like the majority of Iranians we encounter, the former official claimed other countries are deliberating acerbating US-Iranian relations. He said individuals in France, Germany, Russia, China, Arab countries, as well as in Iran, benefit politically and economically from the lack of US-Iran ties. He blamed the EU-3 for the lack of agreement over the nuclear issue

last summer, in particular France, pointing to deals between Iran and Peugeot and Total as evidence of its perfidy.

4.(S/NF) He, like many Iranians, maintains that the UK still controls Iran. When asked how, he said through the clerics, but indirectly. He said his father, a cleric, had told him that the UK pays off advisors to clerics and that often the clerics do not even know that they are being manipulated. When these clerics enter government, they bring these co-optees with them. Separately, he claimed that for the past 10 years, both the UK and Israel have influence inside the IRGC. Furthermore, he was very mistrustful of Russia as an ally for Iran.

How to change direction

5.(S/NF) The former general, though out of the IRGC more than 10 years, felt the IRGC could play a positive role in changing Iran's direction. He maintained that the organization is not as monolithic as it appears and claimed there had been a recent change in character within the organization. He claimed that when a politicized group left the IRGC to follow Ahmadinejad into government, these people chose as their replacements officers they could control. As a result, these officers are weaker, with less influence.

6.(S/NF) While not proposing any particular course of action or role for himself in this meeting, he maintained that a powerful, but untapped, force for influence in Iran are the IRGC officials who became disgruntled over the direction of the IRGC and distanced themselves by taking teaching positions at IRGC's Imam Hossein University and at other institutions. He said they are unhappy with the direction that Ahmadinejad is taking the country but so far have not asserted themselves. Nonetheless, he said, they remain very influential and are well-respected, and as such, they could play a future role. (Note: the source said he serves as a consultant - NFI - to Tehran University. Endnote)

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7.(S/NF) He maintained that such people were concerned about the prospect of a war and see no benefit for Iran from a conflict with the US, but out of loyalty would fight if confrontation happened. He maintained that when the US approaches Iran in a threatening manner, it reinforces negative trends inside the country and works contrary to US goals. The former general said Iranians are very sensitive about specific issues, such as national dignity and religion. He advised against the US trying to choose a future leader for Iran, saying the Iranians would destroy anyone they viewed as a puppet of foreign governments. He claimed, for instance, that President Clinton made a mistake when he voiced his support for student demonstrators, saying this outside support damaged them in the eyes of Iranians.

8.(S/NF) When asked his view of the influence of the Iranian diaspora, he looked at the issue from the point of view of influence through economic investment and used it to object to US sanctions. He said that if the economy in Iran sinks, Iranians outside could influence the course of events through investment in Iran. However, he said, sanctions tie their hands. He also repeated a common warning that Iranians will say one thing, think one thing, and do another. This, he said, is a reason for frequent political surprises in Iran, such as Khatami's 1997 defeat of presumed presidential winner Nadeq-Nouri.

9.(S/NF) In the conversation, the Iranian-American, a long-time supporter of Rafsanjani, predicted that the most practical path to change in Iran is if Rafsanjani becomes Supreme Leader. He claimed some outside Iran predict an IRGC-led coup, installing a military strongman to run the country, but he doubted it would occur.

10.(S/NF) Comment: This was our first meeting with this contact and a rare chance to examine views of a former IRGC official,

albeit one who has been out of the organization for over a decade. While his criticism of sanctions, of third country interference and of any attempt by the US to choose a future leader are predictable, his comments about a weakened IRGC hierarchy was interesting, particularly if eventually the former IRGC officials still yielding influence from their positions in the administration get pushed out. His view of a disgruntled but influential sector of the IRGC in teaching institutions was also noteworthy. In this meeting, he did not try to offer himself as a conduit to the Iranian government in any way. Nor did he seem to be on any kind of expedition to try to collect intelligence. Although his motivation for agreeing to a meeting with IRPO is unclear, he appeared to simply want to express his views of the current situation and to give advice. At several points, he said he wanted to think further on issues, implying readiness to meet again.

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